

First Lady Katie O'Malley, Mayor Rawlings-Blake and State Officials Urge Caution During Heat Wave

Maryland expecting seven or more consecutive days of 90 degree-plus temperatures

Energy assistance, cooling centers and common sense keys to combating high temperatures

*Heat-related Deaths Update***

Governors Office News Release

Baltimore, MD (July 14, 2010) - At Baltimore City's Waxter Senior Center that serves as a cooling center when conditions require, First Lady Katie O'Malley joined Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) Secretary John M. Colmers, Department of Aging Secretary Gloria G. Lawlah and others to urge Marylanders to prepare for the next heat wave and take advantage of energy assistance programs. According to various forecasters, peak daytime temperatures in Maryland are expected to rise above 90 degrees over the next 7 to 14 consecutive days.

"Cooling centers, energy assistance programs and common sense precautions can save lives for those who find themselves vulnerable when temperatures rise above 90 degrees," said First Lady Katie O'Malley. "We may be facing a long stretch of very hot days in the weeks ahead and it's incumbent on each one of us to make sure our loved ones, friends and neighbors have what they need to avoid the heat and stay healthy."

Children under the age of five, seniors over 65 and those with chronic illnesses and disabilities are considered to be at higher risk during prolonged periods of extremely hot weather. In Maryland, when temperatures rise above 90 degrees for 3 days or longer anyone, including those who ordinarily work outdoors, could find themselves in heat-related distress such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

"In the coming days, as temperatures and humidity levels climb, I am asking all citizens to check on family, friends, and neighbors, placing special focus on the elderly," Mayor Rawlings-Blake said. "I have directed City agencies to increase their surveillance, vigilance, and assistance, particularly for vulnerable populations and people with special needs. I am asking all citizens to help us with those efforts." DHMH has reported 12 heat-related deaths so far in 2010, double the number of such deaths in 2009. 11 of the 12 also had serious underlying health conditions such as heart disease and high blood pressure. 10 of the 12 were discovered indoors without air conditioning. Eight of the 12 who died were seniors (65 and older). None were considered homeless.

"A few simple things are most important to remember. Get out of the heat, drink plenty of water or fruit juice and pay attention to the warning signs of heat-related distress such as heavy sweating, muscle pain or spasms, headaches and nausea," said John M. Colmers, DHMH Secretary. "We're seeing heat-related emergency room visits rise and fall with the temperatures and we've noted that most of the heat-related deaths are accompanied by some level of heart disease. Protect yourself by taking common sense precautions and if you're in distress from the heat, call 9-1-1 immediately."

"We are very concerned about the impact of extreme temperatures on our older adult population, as many seniors live in older housing which does not have adequate cooling capability," said Gloria Lawlah, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging. "We urge seniors to seek assistance from us or their local office on aging to find the closest cooling center or other resources that may be available to assist them during this heat emergency".

For additional information, seniors are encouraged to call the Department of Aging at 1-800-AGE-DIAL or 1-800-243-3425. Any resident who may be in need of help to pay their energy bill is urged to call 1-800-925-1446. An online application for energy assistance programs - as well as other social services programs - is available at: www.marylandsail.org.

"Governor O'Malley's increase in energy assistance funding will ensure that DHR can help more people in need," said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. "We want people to come to us and apply for energy assistance rather than think they don't qualify. The dangerous weather conditions warrant -- especially for seniors -- that we all take action to ensure the well being of the members in our community." DHMH cautions Maryland citizens that heatstroke and heat exhaustion can easily develop from the hot and humid conditions typically associated with Maryland summers.

Heatstroke is a serious illness characterized by a body temperature greater than 105 degrees. Symptoms may include dry red skin, convulsions, disorientation, delirium and coma. Onset of heatstroke can be rapid: a person can go from feeling apparently well to a seriously ill condition within minutes. Treatment of heatstroke involves the rapid lowering of body temperature, using a cool bath or wet towels. A heatstroke victim should be kept in a cool area; emergency medical care should be obtained by dialing 911.: Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heatstroke that may develop due to a combination of several days with high temperatures and dehydration in an individual. Signs of heat exhaustion include extreme weakness, muscle cramps, nausea, or headache. Victims may also vomit or faint. Heat exhaustion is treated with plenty of liquids and rest in a cool, shaded area. Those on a low-sodium diet or with other health problems should contact a doctor.

Hot weather tips:

- Drink plenty of fluids such as water and fruit juices to prevent dehydration -- be aware that alcohol can impair the body's sweat mechanism, as can fairly common medications such as antihistamines and diuretics;
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, and light-colored clothes;
- Avoid direct sunlight by staying in the shade and by wearing sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses;
- When possible, stay in air-conditioned areas. If your home is not air-conditioned, consider a visit to a shopping mall or public library. Contact your local health department to see if there are any cooling centers in your area or visit <http://spdev.dhmd.gov:21115/SitePages/Home.aspx> and click on 'Heat-related Illness and Cooling Center Information';
- NEVER leave pets or young children in a car, even with the windows cracked;
- Check on elderly relatives or neighbors at least daily; and
- Take it easy when outdoors. Athletes and those who work outdoors should take short breaks when feeling fatigued. Schedule physical activity during the morning or evening when it is cooler.
- In 2009, six heat-related deaths were reported; 2008 - 17 and in 2007 - 21.

To learn more about preventing heat related illness:

1. [Visit Governor O'Malley's Blog - Links to local Cooling Center information to manage in the extreme heat.](#)
2. [Click on DHMH's Heat-related Illness and Cooling Center Information](#)
3. Visit MEMA at www.mema.state.md.us and click on "Other Natural Disasters."